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ABSTRACT

Due to the "radically mistaken notions" British and American participants had about each other's basic views of education, the 1966 Dartmouth Conference witnessed an unplanned national division, with Americans defending the trinity of language, literature, and composition, and the British advancing their concern for the gratification and fulfillment of the individual student. As Americans espoused their disciplined curriculum, and Englishmen, having discarded that philosophy, promoted the former American position of anti-establishment progressive education, it became clear that the two sides were not debating with each other so much as with their own pasts. The group's final statement, although articulating the agreement reached on two minor issues--the evils of ability grouping and the overemphasis on examination--was generalized and evasive. It failed to reflect the real worth of the Conference, which lay in personal participant discovery of previously unexamined social assumptions forming the foundation of educational theory and practice. The recognition of a need to work together in combining the best of discipline and creativity could lead to a more fruitful second meeting and, perhaps, to more effective English teaching on both sides of the Atlantic. (MF)

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WHAT HAPPENED AT DARTMOUTH?

(A Query by One Who Was There)

by

James E. Miller, Jr.

In the summer 1966, for the first time ever, an Anglo-American conference on the teaching of English was held in Hanover, New Hampshire, on the campus of Dartmouth College. It lasted for four weeks, and included a total of about forty teachers of English, approximately half from the United States and half from England. The entire spectrum of education was represented, from elementary, through secondary, college, and university. The full range of sub-disciplines was included--reading, composition, linguistics, literature. And a rich sampling of personality types was embraced: abstruse scholars, explosive-tempered dogmatists, tentative-minded synthesists, sly wits and dull, aggressive and shy.

Dartmouth had been chosen as conference site because of its rural location. Conference members could not be lured from the discussions by tempting city night-life; they would not be distracted by the disorder of a city's natural chaos and confusion. In the midst of nature on a storied college campus they might find the kind of environment to induce them to do some fundamental rethinking about the nature of the discipline--English--to which they were all devoting their lives. As it actually turned out, Dartmouth was protected, isolated, pastoral--was, in short, dull. Conference participants found themselves dependent for amusement on their own and their comrade's spleen, which flowed abundantly with the talk and the scotch.

The structure of the conference was simple, alternating between plenary sessions at which basic questions were considered and small-group sessions at which from eight to twelve individuals pursued narrower and more specific topics. Such basic questions as the following were set for the plenary sessions: What is English? What is continuity

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in English teaching? What is proficiency in English? Are there standards in English? Is there a standard English? The astonishing thing is that these questions, which any group of citizens off the street could answer in a minute, baffled and frustrated the group of English specialists by remaining stubbornly unanswerable. Some of this frustration was worked off in the small group sessions, where individuals could expatiate on pet panaceas: drama in English teaching; creativity in the English program; response to literature; the meanings and uses of myth; the impact (disastrous, of course) of examinations on English teaching.

This was the structure of the planned conference. But in effect there were forty-one conferences; the one which was planned, and, in essence, realized by no one; and the others unplanned, spontaneous, created by individual participants out of their singular experiences and unique perspectives. It might be said that the British and Americans were deeply divided by a common language; and that the entire conference was shattered into myriad pieces by a common subject and discipline. Some of the rubble splinters turned out to be mere floppy shreds; others twisted and blunt; still others sharp, lethal, ready to draw blood.

In the three years that have passed since Dartmouth, much ambiguity remains as to its meaning and impact. An obscure debate appears to be in languid, occasional progress, but the terms are vague and the issues confusing. The books and articles that have appeared to date, although some have presumed to be objective descriptions and candid reporting, have not clarified matters, and a number have added to the mystifying fog. There were two official reports commissioned on the conference by authors who were in attendance throughout. Englishman John Dixon published his book, Growth through English, in 1967 as a statement for the profession; his title suggests much about his philosophy and nationality: "growth through English" as a phrase implies emphasis on the inner individual, with the subject--English--offering nourishment and providing freedom for development or growth. American Herbert J. Muller published his

book, The Uses of English, in the same year as a statement for the public; and his title suggests much about his nationality and philosophy: The Uses of English implies emphasis on the social individual, with the subject subordinated to practical uses and pragmatic needs.

It is difficult to believe that Dixon and Muller are reporting on the same conference, and their books might be offered in evidence that individuals create their own reality by imposing a vision from within on the muddlement everywhere without. But nevertheless readers may get some notion of the ambiguities of Dartmouth by reading these two reports in succession and letting the certainties and conclusions of one reverberate on the certainties and conclusions of the other.

But although these were the only two commissioned reports--authorized biographies, so to speak--there was no "negative" contract with the other Dartmouth participants: that is, there was no agreement that the others would not write about the conference. It is possible by now that the sponsors wish there had been some such agreement, because some of the reports that are now appearing seem more exposé than personal account. One recent article in the Harvard Educational Review (June, 1969) by participant Wayne O'Neil (a linguist of the transformational-generative-Chomsky persuasion) concludes with this sweeping judgment: "The Dartmouth Seminar could have aimed high, it could have tried to offer a blueprint for education in the Anglo-American countries. Instead it narrowed itself to talk about nothing. In so proceeding it misconceived what it is that needs doing and along the way wasted a good deal of public (Carnegie) money. Its 'findings' should be ignored."

Whatever the "findings" were--and there seems to be no genuine agreement--they appear to have contributed measurably to the alarm in England at the radical changes underway there in education--alarm that precipitated the recent publication of a special issue of The Critical Quarterly as a "black paper" on education. Entitled "Fight for Education," this special issue is a sustained conservative polemic aimed at setting the radicals and progressives to flight and rearming the bastions of tradition and reason.

It is written by such well-known figures as Kingsley Amis, Angus Maude, and John Sparrow, and it contains such titles as "In Praise of Examinations," "Comprehensive Disaster," "Let's Return to Sanity," "The Sleep of Reason."

Of course, Dartmouth cannot claim total credit for arousing such big guns and formidable forces to do-or-die battle. But Dartmouth has played its part, and the battle is joined. But what are the battle cries; where are the issues?

The underlying issue is, I think, change. Whatever brings it about, change is nearly always painful, and those on its side are likely to be suspected of treason, or at least of undermining fundamental values. Of particular interest here is a recent American document entitled "Change in English," a report of the Grove Park English Group which is appearing currently in a number of professional publications. This short manifesto declares in its opening paragraph that "the prevailing view of English has been seriously challenged, a new view has been demanded, and a new view has been slowly emerging." The establishment view of English has been challenged, the document points out, "by the social revolution in American education during the latter half of the 1960's and by such important events as the Dartmouth Seminar of 1966."

(It should be noted parenthetically that the Grove Park English Group consisted of a small group of professionals interested in English education who met with representatives of various disciplines and professional organizations in the spring of 1969 at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, North Carolina. The hardy band of participants hoped that attributing the report to "Grove Park English Group" would impress people the way the attribution of the Woods Hole Conference of 1960 impressed and impresses readers of Jerome Bruner's <u>The Process of Education</u>. There were, too, other motives in connecting, however remotely, "Change in English" with

The Process of Education: Bruner's book had helped establish some of the very principles and practices which the Grove Park English Group saw being challenged and called into question. In effect, Grove Park pitted itself against Woods Hole. Although these may sound like battles from the Civil War, they are in reality obscure academic skirmishes fought in the comfort and luxury of remote corners of suburbia and interurbia. As a confession I should add that I have never seen Woods Hole, on Cape Cod, but I chaired the Grove Park English Group in Asheville.)

And to emerge from the parentheses, I was also at the 1966 Dartmouth Seminar. Even so, the question as to "What Happened at Dartmouth?" I cannot presume to answer. But I can answer, fairly clearly, "what happened at Dartmouth to me?" Dartmouth was not so much a collective as an individual experience. If I may take myself as a typical participant, I may generalize that each of the participants came with one set of ideas and left with another. And as all of the diverse participants started from unique positions, the movements and shifts were not all in the same direction, and by no means unified or parallel. Not all the participants, of course, adopted a wholly new set of ideas: probably no one was so transfigured. But it is inconceivable to me that any single participant remained unshaken in the certain certainties that he brought with him in his intellectual baggage to Hanover.

A few general (and quite personal) impressions may be useful as a preliminary to assessing the modification of my own views at Dartmouth. The first thing

that happened at the opening plenary session was an unplanned national division. The British drifted to one side, the Americans to another, as though preparing for congressional or parliamentary debate under party loyalty and discipline. The variety of voices that filled the air was enough to precipitate cultural shock in those who depended on the common language to bind us all together: there was the dry, restrained RP (received pronunciation) of the British side by side with nasal twang of middle American and the soft slurring of American southern, and many more. However odd it may seem, the British--with the exception of a very few with some trace of Welsh or Scottish accent or of Cockney--spoke as with one voice in one accent--the accent that Americans have come to identify as cultured British, a perfect instrument for evading or disguising emotion and for sharpening and parrying with, particularly of the lethal variety. On their side the Americans, sounding frequently harsh and coarse in contrast with the elegant British, spoke with a multitude of voices in accents that seemed to leave them peculiarly defenseless and vulnerable.

The opening confrontation appeared, in short, an international confrontation. And it must have been an insensitive American who did not feel the presence of unstated questions hovering in the air--questions posed in the cultured tones of the British RP: English? Is it English we are going to discuss? Well, now, of course, it is <u>our</u> language, you know, and <u>our</u> literature. What is it, now, you want to know about it? What can we tell you that will help you along?

Now I must stress that these questions are pure personal fantasy, and they may border on the paranoid; but they will suggest the kind of fantasies with which many Americans are familiar when in the presence of what can only be called the intimidating accents of RP, with its historic connotations of feelings of disdain and superiority. What American has not felt (if he be perfectly honest with himself) the barbarity of his own thick tongue in the presence of the fluency

of the elegant RP? What American has not discovered his emotions showing through his language while his British cousin's RP flowed on without a ripple on its impenetrable surface.

But these were the concealed--and I cannot stress too much quite personally detected--tensions that stiffened the opening session. There were abundant unconcealed tensions that quickly gathered to dismay all those expectations of a harmonious meeting of minds at already discovered truths. Almost immediately it became clear that both the British and Americans had radically mistaken notions of each other's basic views of education. It was as though both had come to debate opponents who had, without advance warning, undergone major conversions to unfamiliar doctrines--doctrines which had only superficial resemblances to discarded doctrines of the past in both England and America.

In order to come to some understanding of the nature of these conversions, it is necessary to simplify and condense educational history for a moment. If what I describe here seems to be largely myth, I remind you that we live by myths as much as by actualities. By all the signs the British had read, the Americans who came to Dartmouth should have been expressing the dogmas of progressive education, with all its human compassion, permissiveness, and emphasis on the whole child. By all the signs the Americans had read, the British should have come espousing the principles of an elitist classical education, with all its discipline, respect for excellence, and emphasis on roots firmly implanted in the authority of the tradition. The opening session at Dartmouth was surrealistic in the sense that the British sounded to the Americans like themselves (their <u>other</u> progressive selves), and the Americans sounded to the British like <u>their</u> discarded authoritarian selves. In short, the British seemed to be the progressivists, while the Americans talked like classicists.

What had happened? Well, in America a great deal had happened, particularly during the 1950's. Because of its immense and bewildering diversity, all

generalizations about American education tend to be false. But some, however simplistic, must be ventured. Some time early in the century, during the age of Dewey, progressive ideas in education gradually subverted the old authoritarian notions surviving out of the nineteenth century. As they travelled great distances from their source, these progressive ideas became more and more distorted, quaint, whimsical; in the hands of mediocre and inferior educationists, they became clearly irresponsible and imply another manifestation of American frontier anti-intellectualism. The counter-revolution against progressive education began probably with its birth, but did not make notable headway until the 1950's, and can mark the beginning of its major triumph with the ascent of Sputnik I in 1957. Who can doubt that had Sputnik I carried the American brand name rather than the Russian, the history of American education for the past dozen years and more would be radically different?

But Sputnik I was Russian, and the race to reinstitute subject matter in the American school curriculums began. Of course, the emphasis was on science, as everyone knew that it was science, and not the humanities or social sciences, that put Sputnik into the skies. But even the second class disciplines felt the need to reform--sometimes out of fear of being abolished as irrelevant. In English the major thrust was to purify the subject of all the extraneous accretions it had gathered to it over the years of its progressive development. Americans over forty, and even some over thirty, can remember English classes in which they learned to carry on a conversation over the telephone, how to introduce a gentleman to a lady or a lady to a gentleman (or variations with multiples of either sex), how to write letters to a friend, to an acquaintance, to a prospective employer, how to elicit conversation from a boyfriend or girlfriend on a date, how to act in the junior or senior play, how to write a feature story for a school newspaper, how to edit a school annual, how to, how to, how to. . . The disenchantment with such a cluttered, scattered, and weakened

curriculum (as it then seemed) was intensified by consciousness of the waste of the quickest students with the brightest minds in the avalanche of trivia. The disenchantment was so widespread and deep that there might have been a cry to return to the formidable discipline of the nineteenth century classical curriculum of Greek and Latin had there been enough teachers around who knew enough Greek and Latin to reinstate them as universal requirements. Instead, the cry arose to look to the universities at home and to the British schools abroad, to adopt a strictly academic (no-nonsense) curriculum with emphasis on discipline and tradition.

In their own way, and for a number of other historical causes, the English too were undergoing rapid changes in their educational system. As the American school system had grown more progressive over the years, the British system seemed to grow more traditional and elitist, with enormous emphasis on academic examinations (the Eleven Plus) determining at an early age, and with grim finality, the entire future of the individual students, sending the bulk off to trade or technical schools and into the job market, and saving a fortunate minority for traditional academic education leading to card-carrying membership in the establishment, or in the jargon of the leftists, the "ruling class." As the American progressive system seemed designed for mass, democratic education, bent on a cult of the mediocre and a worship of the average, the British traditional system seemed designed for elitist education in a class society, bent on a cult of excellence for an aristocracy of both inheritance and intelligence (blue bloods and fine minds). And just as the American progressives, after World War II, came under increasing attack, so the British traditionalists became the targets of growing criticism. War is a great leveller, and the widespread unhappiness with the British elitist school system erupted in a series of radical changes that are still in controversial progress. The result was the phenomenal growth in the post-war years of the comprehensive schools and the red-brick universities.

The comprehensive school was modelled roughly (some would say very roughly) on the American high school, "comprehensively" combining both academic and technical (or trade school) curriculums, thus providing both a democratic setting and a more elastic or flexible program in contrast with the great private Grammar Schools, with their elitist enrollment and their rigid academic (university oriented) program. The red-brick universities, somewhat (but very roughly) comparable to America's large public universities were a response to the widespread democratic demand for greater opportunities for higher education. In response to these and other democratic pressures, and out of the necessities of the new mass education, a new philosophy of education began to evolve in England, a philosophy that tended to be anti-examination, anti-traditional, anti-establishment, anti-discipline, and even (in some sense) anti-intellectual, with some of the vocabulary, ideas, and attitudes of the presumably discredited American progressive educationists.

At the historic moment of the Anglo-American encounter at Dartmouth in 1966, the British and the Americans brought with them distinctly outdated images of each other. The British, in the euphoria of their new-found democratic principles of education, expected the Americans to be progressive and approving. The Americans in the euphoria of their recently-discovered intellectual traditionalism expected the British to be classical and sympathetic. After the first exchanges at Dartmouth, all of the participants suffered severe attacks of cultural shock. Expectations exploded, certain certainties crumbled, and philosophical foundations listed and creaked. As the exchange continued, following the program so meticulously structured and the scripts so carefully prepared, it became clear that the British and Americans were not debating with each other so much as with their own pasts. The British neo-progressivists spent much of their time attacking the authoritarianism and elitism and traditionalism and discipline symbolized by the

British grammar school at its worst, while the American neo-classicists spent their time scorning the anarchism and mediocrity and superficiality and unruliness of the American comprehensive high school at its worst. There was, however, one common concern that went almost unnoticed. In spite of the gulf separating the two delegations, both seemed genuinely concerned for inhumanity and waste of talent in the educational systems. The British found this waste imposed by a system making no genuine provision for the mass of students derailed from the university-bound track by the blundering examination system. The Americans found this waste imposed by a system making no solid provision for the intellectual development of the academically gifted students university-bound. Instead of exploring the historic developments that brought the two groups to this particular moment in time and these particular perspectives, the conference continued on its course of debating issues for which there was no common experience: a debate in which even the ordinary and familiar terms had irrelevant and meaningless connotations that shunted the discussions into empty confrontations on inconsequential or irrelevant or even meaningless questions.

All this is true, but it is not the whole truth. It cannot be too frequently stressed that with so many strong individualists involved, any generalization tends to distort. But even so, it is possible to rough out in broad strokes the substance of the American and British positions, and it is, I think, worth the attempt as well as worth the risk of distortion. To transfer familiar terms to an exotic context, the Americans tended to be <u>trinitarians</u>, while the British seemed to be on the whole strict <u>unitarians</u>. I am not, of course, speaking of religious belief, though the tenacity and fervor with which some participants clung to certain dogmas implied religious commitment.

The trinity for the Americans was made up of the familiar trio--language, composition, literature. The first large question set for the conference had been: "What is English?" The Americans knew, if they knew anything, the answer to that

question. Hadn't they gone through the agonies of curriculum re-appraisal, dumping overboard all that excess baggage of irrelevant and meaningless accretions? And hadn't the Commission on English of the CEEB (College Entrance Examinations Board) spoken for the profession when it published Freedom and Discipline in English (1965) proclaiming the reign of the trinity, language, composition, and literature. Moreover, hadn't Jerome Brunner, in the Process of Education (1960; a product of the Woods Hole Conference), demonstrated that any subject can be taught in some form at any level of the curriculum: the only educational task was to discover the basic structure of the subject, and proceed to teach that structure. And, after all, hadn't this task been performed for language, composition, and literature by all the Project English curriculum centers in a veritable torrent of materials all verifying that the structure of language was mathematically demonstrable in the laws of grammar (we lay aside for the moment the embarrassment of the battle as to which of the competing linguistic legislatures was to be permitted to write the laws); that the structure of composition was identifiable in the rules of rhetoric; and that the structure of literature was clearly manifest in the principles of criticism (and here we simply turn aside from all the fierce battles waging over whose principles for what kind of criticism).

By a mere sleight of hand, then, worthy of a shrewd yankee trader, the trinity of language, composition, and literature was transfigured into the trinity of linguistics, rhetoric, and criticism, whose laws, rules, and principles constituted a structure in the Brunnerian sense which could make up the body of knowledge that might be taught at any and every level of the curriculum. Furthermore, the American Project English curriculum centers had already gone quite far along the road of converting all these discoveries and truths into daily classroom assignments, from the kindergarten level on up. And these materials were scattered

about the meeting rooms of Dartmouth for the edification of any of the unenlightened. The Americans anticipated, of course, that the British would fill their wheelbarrows with these materials, cart them away for further study, and come back converted. On the contrary, the British merely circled about the materials, sniffed at them, flipped through a few pages now and then, and departed with pursed lips and slightly glazed eyes. One of the dramatic moments of the conference came during a heated exchange on the teaching of linguistic grammar, which the Americans haltingly and hesitantly defended while the British clucked and deplored. One of the more arrogantly aggressive of the Englishmen rose in all his aristocratic bearing, walked over to a table and plucked off a page of junior high Project English materials that was covered with the strange hieroglyphics, the cabalistic formulae of Chomsky's transformational or generative grammar. Holding this unreadable and baffling page aloft, the Englishman said in the meticulous accents of his controlled rage (I quote in approximation only, from a fading memory): "I would not carry this material into any classroom at any level of the curriculum. It represents an affront to the mind and an insult to the imagination; it is beneath contempt and beyond discussion." There followed a stunned silence; present among us Americans were the makers, supporters, or approvers of those materials. But there were none among us willing or able to explain those occult and arcane equations, or to demonstrate how seventh or eighth graders might be lured into curiosity about them, or to show how they benefitted once they had mastered the esoterica of their formulation. Silence begat silence, and a shift of focus; and the raw and painful moment was gradually soothed over by the steady flow of talk.

While the trinitarianism of the Americans filtered through all their discussion and was stamped indelibly on all the project English materials surrounding the conference, the unitarianism of the British was a more subtle presence and

force. As a matter of fact, there were mavericks that strayed from the American position, but the British seemed to present a united front without a single, serious dissent. Gradually their theological positions appeared to emerge: D. H. Lawrence was their God, and F. R. Leavis was his Prophet. Of all literary figures mentioned at some time during the conference, there can be no doubt that Lawrence's name led all the rest in number and warmth of feeling: at every turn the British cited him, quoted him, praised him, and worshipped him. For the Americans this was something of a novelty: Lawrence, they thought, was important--but that important? How? Why? Lawrence the author of Lady Chatterly's Lover, Lawrence the proponent of sexual identity, Lawrence the apostle of the solar plexus as the center of omni-sexual being: was this Lawrence the end-all, the be-all, the cure-all for school boys and girls and their problems? It turned out, of course, that the Lawrence of the British was different from this American conception; not once, for example, did they cite Lady Chatterly's Lover, and they remained generally silent on Lawrence's vital sexual themes. Their Lawrence was the Lawrence who wrote of his childhood home in the bleak coal-mining Midlands area of England, and who surmounted his social and economic handicaps to escape the blight and nightmare of his inherited industrial environment. Indeed, the cumulative British references to Lawrence made it seem that he served most handily as an example for all the hordes of present day British school children from the industrial slums of modern Britain crowding the British comprehensive schools. The Americans had no comparable unified point of literary reference, but they might have similarly baffled the British had they all agreed to refer only to William Faulkner as a school literary text, and had ignored completely Faulkner's complex psychology, sexual themes, and philosophical depths, and had instead referred only to a few obscure stories dealing sympathetically with poor country people and blacks.

But the D. H. Lawrence of the British came to them, apparently, through the other most frequently mentioned figure at the conference, F. R. Leavis. Lawrence, of course, is a central novelist in Leavis's eccentric definition of The Great Tradition, and is the focus of one of Leavis's critical works, D. H. Lawrence: Novelist. Leavis has never had the kind of reputation in America that he has had in England, and even there he remains a highly controversial figure. It was astonishing for the Americans to discover how many of the British participants had studied directly under F. R. Leavis or had studied under a Leavis disciple. It is not, perhaps, an exaggeration to describe the British delegation as composed primarily of Leavisites. And for the Americans this became a puzzle: how did F. R. Leavis become the John Dewey of British education? The image of Leavis most Americans carried to Dartmouth was of a brilliant crank, opinionated and slightly paranoid, who had written an early and important book on T. S. Eliot, and who was able in some amazing intellectual gymnastics to reconcile enthusiasms for T. S. Eliot and D. H. Lawrence--in the face, moreover, of Eliot's bristling contempt for Lawrence. In many ways F. R. Leavis appeared to be the Cleanth Brooks of England (though Brooks would never, I suspect, elevate Lawrence to his pantheon), with a strong new-critical bent, publishing his and his disciple's close reading of selected literary texts in the little magazine, Scrutiny, that he edited for some twenty-one years. To many American academics Leavis seemed to have the peculiar ability to convert any literary text that he like enthusiastically into a masterpiece by close literary analysis accompanied by a continuous flow of unexamined and unchallenged sweeping assumptions and dogmatic formulations. He seemed the epitome of British aristocratic and classical educational elitism, a veritable symbol of the "lit-crit" culture that came under attack at Dartmouth. How, the Americans wondered, did he ever become the fountainhead of the neo-progressivism of modern British education? The English referred

to him invariably with reverence and awe, and they spoke as with one voice in his and Lawrence's praise.

As the Americans located their trinity in the subject of English, the British established their fundamental unitarianism in the nature of the individual pupil. Their indifference to a structured curriculum and their insistence on the gratification of every student need, desire, or whim seemed to the Americans to border on genteel anarchy if not absolute chaos. What about teaching students standard English? Goodness! Leave their language alone. Shouldn't they be taught composition in order to communicate? Horrors! Give them opportunities to be imaginative, creative, to express and discover themselves, their honest, deep-down, genuine selves. But shouldn't the great literary heritage be preserved and taught them for their and the culture's edification? Rubbish! Let them read what interests them, what they want to read, what is relevant to their various interests. Moreover, children should not be <u>taught</u>; they should be provided environments and experiences in which they may learn--in their own way and at their own pace. Teachers should never do more than occasionally <u>nudge</u> the child along. What about a sequential curriculum? The only sequence that makes sense is the sequence of individual experiences of individual children; throw out all the plans and structures imposed from outside, and let the children discover their own curriculum by creating their own experiences.

In the midst of these exchanges (that seemed to have a circular rather than a linear movement), the Americans discovered how much their own notions of education were shaped by their social outlook and their country's political philosophy. American society was a fluid, mobile society, the people in transition and generally upward bound. Standard English was not merely a nicety, but a necessity for getting and holding a better job. Correctness and clarity in composition were not merely decorative but decisive assets in a business career. Minority groups like the blacks could most quickly climb up the social and economic ladder by

deliberately acquiring the standard language and the valuable ability to write "good" English. Indeed, minority groups had always themselves demanded this pragmatic kind of education.

In contrast to this position, the British cry of "leave their language alone" sounded again and again. And from one standpoint, this cry can be made to seem both humane and pedagogically sound. Constant correction of a child's language can inhibit him, can make him ashamed of his own dialect. and can suppress his creative instincts and his natural love of language-play. But from another standpoint this cry can be made to sound both inhumane and socially oppressive. When you hear the cry--"leave their language alone"--sounded again and again in the highly cultured accents of the Oxford Received Pronunciation (accents in some cases studiedly and deliberately acquired at the older authoritarian schools), you begin to entertain the ugly suspicion that something more is behind it than sentimental humanitarianism. In a surrealistic dream it may begin to sound like Marie Antoinette's cry, "Let them eat cake." And indeed, at one point in the debate, one of the Englishmen made a slip that tended to confirm the instinctual feelings of many of the Americans. Of what value, he asked, is a laboriously acquired standard dialect for one who comes from and returns to a social level where it is irrelevant to his life. "For his **place** in life, acquiring standard English is a waste of time." When the class snobbery implicit in this view of one's social place was gleefully pointed out by the Americans, the speaker sputtered and back-tracked and retreated into vague democratic protestations.

Although generally suppressed by the British delegation, they carried with them a fairly strong sense of social place, and a kind of unconscious commitment to a static society. The cry, "leave their language alone," subtly implied--"leave them in their place," "let the working class have and keep their language." Just as the Americans learned how firmly rooted their ideas were in

their democratic social system, so perhaps did the British come to confront their own unconscious reflection of the strong sense of class in their society. Now of course, the Americans did not vulgarly promote the crass materials end of education (as some British believed), nor did the British snobbishly propose education as a means for preserving the class system (as some Americans thought): but still, both groups brought to Dartmouth unexamined social assumptions that they were forced ultimately to reexamine.

And lest some people think that the Dartmouth seminar was, as a whole, essentially regressive, with the Americans espousing a discarded British authoritarianism, and the British promoting a discredited American progressivism, I must hasten to point out that along with all the similarities, there were radical differences. These differences might be suggested by a couple of examples. Whereas the old American progressivism had as a primary goal the adapting (or acculturation) of the child to his society, the new British progressivism denied such an aim and emphasized the personal development of the child--a development which might well bring him into conflict with his society and its prevailing values. And similarly, the old British authoritarianism had as its aim the acquisition--but not necessarily the assimilation--of large bodies of knowledge and reams of facts, by the use if needed of rote learning and endless memorization. The new American classicism avoided these aims and methods, and placed emphasis on linguistic, compositional, and literary experiences that would indirectly bestow the knowledge of grammar, rhetoric, and criticism that every educated man should possess. Neither the British nor the Americans advocated a return to the worst practices of the past.

When the Dartmouth Seminar drew to a close, the participants were asked to identify areas of agreement. Some eleven points were agreed on, but to assure

general assent, the points were worded with all the piety and all the punch of a resolution favoring the American flag at an American legion convention. There was, the participants agreed, "the compelling urgency of improving the conditions," "the need for radical reform in programs," "the importance of educating the public." These are only some of the scraps of language imbedded in the eleven points. This closing manifesto is remarkably silent on some of the major issues debated at the seminar; and on the issues it does venture to touch, it leaps to a level of generality and ambiguity high and intense enough to soar beyond debate. On two relatively minor issues, however, the Americans and British did reach agreement: ability grouping and examinations. There was general recognition of the evils of tracking (or streaming, as the British called it): it served as a means in both countries of preserving distinctions of class or race; and recognition that examinations, especially in England, but also as gradually evolving in America, determined too directly the fate of students and influenced too decisively the content of curriculums. (But even in these areas there may not have been as much agreement as met the eye. The Americans had developed college entrance examinations and so-called college bound tracks in order to identify, in the welter of genuinely comprehensive high schools, capable students who might be prepared for university. On the other hand, the British had long devoted almost their sole educational effort to this group, especially in elite private grammar schools. With the advent of democratic education of the masses in so-called comprehensive high schools in Britain, the establishment grammar schools remained intact with their university preparatory curriculums. There was perhaps an unspoken assumption in the British Dartmouth delegation that the grammar schools would continue their role as university preparatory schools for the cream of British youth, while the so-called comprehensive schools, free of the burden of academic preparation, could be made more democratic and pragmatic, and less traditional and hide-bound.)

But in spite of the lack of formal agreements or conclusions at the end of the Dartmouth Seminar, there was, I believe, an informal understanding that emerged, tentatively and intuitively, that remains to this day, some four years later, unformulated and unwritten, but which never-the-less has become a pervasive influence and force in both countries. In this view, language is seen as something more than "a bunch of rules" for communication (a definition I once elicited from a seventh-grader after his grammar drill); it is, instead, the infinitely pliable, infinitely resiliant stuff of creation. It is through language that we discover our identity, and it is with language that we create our world, imposing our order on the chaos and flux of reality. And it is with language that we create the personal, national, or human myths by which we live. Language lies so close to the living, breathing soul of the individual, in short, that it cannot be separated from <u>being</u>: it is the creative life-blood of the individual. From this fundamental view of language flows a series of related views. Perhaps the most important of these is the vital role of the imagination. If language is the stuff of creativity, it is the imagination that is the making and shaping faculty. Wherever language manifests itself, the imagination plays a crucial role. If this is true, as I believe it to be, then it follows that English teachers from kindergarten through graduate school have in common the goal of developing, nourishing, educating what may be called the linguistic imagination of their students. This goal may be achieved in an infinite variety of ways, but the ways must all recognize that the imagination of the individual is both consumer and producer, that it achieves fullest life in both receiving and giving, apprehending and generating. Experiences in the creative uses of language become, then, not decorative frills but vitally relevant experiences that go to the heart of the matter. And experiences in literature that genuinely engage and extend the imagination play a central role in this process.

This is but a hasty, hazy sketch, couched in my personal vocabulary and bent by my personal vision, of the unformulated, unstated discovery of Dartmouth. And moreover, I think, the beliefs embraced and practices implied by this sketch run counter to those prevailing in the profession today, in both England and America. However much all of the Dartmouth participants might disagree on most of the issues examined, they could possibly agree that the ideal conception of English teaching, if it is ever to be achieved or even conceived, must somehow combine the creativity stressed by the British together with the discipline represented by the Americans. Creativity and discipline are not, after all, incompatible; are they not the essence of all art worthy the name? Even, surely, the art of living.

In the meantime it is to be hoped that there will be another Dartmouth. It would be extremely interesting and valuable for the profession, I believe, to hear what those participants (and others) might have to say after five or six years of reflection on the traumatic encounter in 1966. I suspect that the questions would change and the answers shift. Certainties would have faded, and assurances dimmed. I cannot conceive that any one participant would return with identical beliefs and commitments. After all, ours is a profession dedicated to imaginative growth. It might be that after half a decade of painful reappraisal, we would all be ready (as we were not before) to examine together, in genguinely engaged discussion, the basic assumptions, principles, and definitions of English teaching.

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